



Mission at Nuremberg

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Questions for Discussion

1. The two Nuremberg chaplains' main goal was to bring as many of the 21 Nazi leaders on trial back to a serious relationship with their Christian faith before their possible execution. If you're a Christian, do you feel that was a worthy mission? If you're not a Christian, how do you feel about the U.S. government providing chaplains to do the work of Christian evangelism?
2. Gerecke decided to leave his wife, Alma, and youngest child to join a war in which his two older sons were already fighting. Was that decision fair to Alma?
3. Put in Gerecke's place at the end of the war, would you have chosen to go quietly home to your family, or be a part of history by counseling the architects of a genocide?
4. Gerecke was criticized in the U.S., especially by American Jews, after he wrote later about shaking the hands of the Nazi leaders upon first meeting them. Does his explanation that he needed these men to like him in order to do his job suffice?
5. Do you think Jewish religious leaders should have been consulted by the Allies before the decision was made to provide the Nazis with Christian chaplains?
6. What do you think of Gerecke's decision to withhold Holy Communion from Hermann Goering when he knew Goering was about to be put to death?
7. When you read that Gerecke told Goering's wife that her husband's death was "not a suicide in the eyes of God," and that O'Connor wrote to Hans Frank's son that his father had gone "straight to heaven," did you think the chaplains had taken Christian charity too far?
8. In Simon Wiesenthal's story "The Sunflower," which is recounted by the author, Wiesenthal recalls refusing to forgive an SS officer for taking part in a massacre of a Jewish town. The living, says Wiesenthal's colleague in the concentration camp, can't speak for the dead to forgive their murderers. Discuss the differences and similarities between the Jewish and Christian concepts of forgiveness.
9. How would you feel about an American Army chaplain pastoring a suspect in the September 11th terrorist attacks imprisoned at the Guantanamo Bay detention camp?
10. What do you make of Gerecke's lifelong need to reach people on the margins—whether it was poor people during the Depression, war criminals in Nuremberg or death row inmates in an Illinois maximum security prison?